

S.J. eyesores to be cleaned up

Grant to fund work clearing illegal dumps

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Alongside acres of asparagus, Bill Vierra has an unfortunate bumper crop: mattresses, burned-out and broken-down televisions, and used tires.

Vierra can only shake his head at a 40-yard, garbage-strewn patch of grass between the fields his family has farmed since 1936 and Inland Road in a rural area just west of Stockton. Everything from a pair of shoes to a couch have been dumped, mostly late at night, by people Vierra and San Joaquin County sheriff's deputies have little chance of catching.

"You name it, it's here," Vierra said of his odd — and illegal — junk collection, a collection that has been accumulating for more years than he can remember. "I try and clean it up, but what can you do?"

This summer, however, Vierra will have some help in his cleanup attempt.

San Joaquin County recently received a grant from a new state program to clean up rural, privately owned agricultural sites that are frequent targets of illegal dumping. The county will receive \$49,312 to pick up garbage at nine sites.

By the time the grant is spent, more than 3,300 cubic yards of garbage — or about five ranch-style homes filled from floor to ceiling — will have been cleared off land throughout the county.

That's a lot of trash.

"It's a big problem," said Alison Hudson, an analyst with the Public Works Department who will help oversee the county's grant. "It's the same story everywhere. There are wide-open spaces and a lot of stuff."

The new money comes from the Farm and Ranch Solid Waste Cleanup Program, which is a result of legislation enacted in



Record photos by CLIFFORD OTO



SCARS UPON THE LAND:

Trash litters the landscape along Inland Drive near Highway 4, above, just west of Stockton. San Joaquin County recently received a grant from a new state program to clean up rural, privately owned agricultural sites that are frequent targets of illegal dumping like this one. Left, Robert McClellon, San Joaquin County Public Health Services registered environmental-health specialist, examines abandoned drums along the same section of roadside.

1997 to address a statewide problem.

Robert McClellon, a county environmental health specialist, said piles of trash — particularly tires, which are a common sight in rural San Joaquin

County — can lead to mosquito or bee problems, or contaminated groundwater, among other things.

And illegal dumping is a particularly nasty problem in large, rural counties like San Joaquin,

McClellon said.

While the county has no list of illegal dump sites, McClellon's office often fields complaints from farmers like Vierra, he said.

Please see DUMPS, Back page

DUMPS

Continued from A1

"It's anybody's guess (how many there are)," he said. "You could probably add one right now — somebody's dumping something somewhere."

The state's program, which also is funding cleanup efforts in three other counties, required the sites to be on rural land and have a cost of less than \$10,000 per site for cleanup. The county estimates it will remove about 700 tires, 24 vehicles and 49 appliances from the nine areas, which are scattered throughout all corners of the county.

The grant is expected to be accepted by the county Board of Supervisors later this month. If approved, the county will use inmates from the County Jail for the job.

The grant also allows the county to look at ways to prevent future dumping on the selected sites, although fencing off privately owned areas is probably not possible, Hudson said.

But signs warning people that being caught dumping trash on private property can result in a \$1,000 fine may help deter dumpers, she said.

Both McClellon and Hudson said the state was looking at other ways to steer people with garbage away from rural areas and toward landfills.

"We're at the very early stages of dealing with this problem," McClellon said. Some states have new laws that allow prosecution of illegal dumping suspects if two pieces of mail with the same address can be found at a



AP photo

BIG MESS: Alison Hudson, a San Joaquin County analyst with the solid-waste division, walks past an illegally dumped refrigerator at a site along Acampo Road.

Illegal S.J. dump sites to be cleaned up

Nine illegal dump sites in San Joaquin County will be cleaned up this summer. Their approximate locations are:

- Holt Road, west of Stockton.
- Acampo Road, west of Acampo.
- Stewart and Cohen roads, Lathrop.

- Inland Road, west of Stockton.
- Holt and Neugebauer roads, west of Stockton.
- South Maybeck Road, west of Stockton.
- South Inland Drive, west of Stockton.
- Two sites near Lower Sacramento Road at the Sacramento County line.

site, he said.

Vierra said he thought the signs might help keep people away from his farmland. But he remained skeptical that the prob-

lem could be completely eliminated.

"We clean it up, but they come and dump again," he said.